The European Union places considerable value on police cooperation in order to face internal security threats such as serious crime, cybercrime, trafficking in human beings, terrorism, money counterfeiting, corruption and money laundering. In this framework, Europol, since its formal creation in 1998, has been a major instrument allowing close cooperation between competent authorities of EU Member States and, where possible, with those of particular non-EU countries. This Topical Digest offers a selection of recent publications by the European Parliamentary Research Service, on relevant issues and developments.

Europol: The EU’s law enforcement cooperation agency
Briefing by Carmen-Cristina Cîrlig, September 2019
Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (better known as Europol) is the EU body tasked with supporting and strengthening action by the Member States’ police authorities and other law enforcement services, and their mutual cooperation in preventing and combating serious crime affecting two or more Member States, terrorism and forms of crime which affect a common interest covered by a Union policy. On 1 July 2019, Europol celebrated 20 years of operations. Evolving from informal police cooperation in the 1970s to a fully fledged EU agency with a recently strengthened mandate (Regulation (EU) 2016/794), Europol is the EU institution with the longest history in the justice and home affairs field.

Use of financial data for preventing and combatting serious crime
EU Legislation in Progress Briefing by Carmen-Cristina Cîrlig, July 2019
Adopted in June 2019, the new directive on the access and use of financial data for preventing and combating serious crime strengthens the exchange of information between Member States in order to facilitate cross-border exchange of information. Reinforcing the role of the financial intelligence units (FIU) created in 2000 under the Third Anti-Money-Laundering Directive (AMLD), and strengthened by the Fourth and Fifth AMLDs, the new directive grants access to financial information to competent authorities working on serious crimes as defined in Annex I of the Europol Regulation.

Interoperability between EU border and security information systems
EU Legislation in Progress Briefing by Katrien Luyten and Sofija Voronova, June 2019
The new rules aim to improve checks at the EU’s external borders, allow for better detection of security threats and identity fraud, and help in preventing and combating irregular migration. The regulation on interoperability between EU border and security information systems came into force in June 2019. The aim is to have complete interoperability by the end of 2023 between the various systems in place and under development, such as a centralised database with information on convictions of third-country nationals and stateless persons (ECRIS-TCN), the entry/exit system (EES), the Eurodac Regulation, ETIAS and SIS II. It also extends the mandate of eu-Lisa, the EU agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice.
The fight against terrorism

EU policies – Delivering for citizens, Briefing by Beatrix Immenkamp, Gianluca Sgueo and Sofija Voronova, June 2019

Faced with a growing international terrorist threat, the EU is playing an ever more ambitious role in counter-terrorism. Police cooperation is, among other solutions, an important tool in this framework. Europol has been reinforced thanks to its new mandate, entering into force in May 2017, and has also created its European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC). Through the ECTC, Europol provides operational and strategic support. The ECTC also tackles terrorist content on the internet and tracks terrorist financing.

The fight against terrorism

Cost of Non-Europe Report by Wouter van Ballegooij and Piotr Bąkowski, May 2018

Significant benefits could be achieved by the EU and its Member States through addressing gaps and barriers in the area of the fight against terrorism, notably by developing an evidence-based EU criminal policy cycle involving the European Parliament and national parliaments. The EU fights terrorism through police cooperation, thanks in particular to Europol. Creating the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) in January 2016 has helped to pool Europol’s anti-terrorist capacities.

The return of foreign fighters to EU soil

Ex-post evaluation study edited by Amandine Scherrer, May 2018

Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, thousands of EU nationals have travelled or attempted to travel to conflict zones in Iraq and Syria to join insurgent terrorist groups, such as ISIL/Da’esh (‘Islamic State’). Europol has a central role in strengthening Member States’ capacities on departees/returnees, not least through the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC). Two projects in particular address the foreign fighters’ phenomenon: Hydra, which supports the prevention of terrorism-related crimes, and Focal Point Travellers, which collates data on people travelling for terrorist purposes.

Further reading

Area of Freedom, security and justice
Cost of Non-Europe Report by Wouter Van Ballegooij, May 2019
Unlocking the potential of the EU Treaties
Study by Etienne Bassot, January 2019
Mutual recognition of freezing and confiscation orders
EU Legislation in Progress Briefing by Carmen-Cristina Cirlig, December 2018
Report of the Special Committee on Terrorism
‘At a glance’ note by François Théron, December 2018
EU Agencies, common approach and parliamentary scrutiny
Ex-post evaluation study by Ron Korver, November 2018
Access to financial data by law enforcement authorities
Initial Appraisal of a European Commission Impact Assessment Briefing by Katharina Eisele, June 2018
The institutional architecture of EU anti-fraud measures
In-depth Analysis by Gianluca Sgueo, June 2018
Revision of the immigration liaison officers network
Implementation Appraisal Briefing by Amandine Scherrer with Cecilia Isaksson, May 2018

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https://epthinktank.eu/topical-digests/